Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee

Promoting Equity and Fairness for all Albertans

Future Directions for Human Rights and Diversity

Alberta
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Human Rights, Citizenship & Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee

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In March 2000, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee hosted a series of nine meetings with stakeholders across the province. Over 100 organizations participated in this process. These meetings were structured as conversations and provided an opportunity for dialogue amongst the participants. These dialogues formed part of our on-going evaluation to help ensure that the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund remains a vital and effective program that responds to the needs of Albertans.

The Albertans who participated in the Dialogue with Stakeholders came from many backgrounds and represented organizations with a wide variety of interests and activities. We talked about the best ways to address key issues in human rights and diversity work. The discussions were animated. We heard many different views. However, all perspectives came together in the vision that we share: the vision of a human rights culture in Alberta, a culture that respects and values all people and enables them to participate fully in all aspects of society.

The members of the Advisory Committee gathered a great deal of useful feedback during the Dialogue with Stakeholders. The members who were involved with this process include Dennis Kowalishin, Catherine Smith, Adrian Stimson, Ross Watson and Charlach Mackintosh, Vice Chair of the Advisory Committee and Chief Commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

In this report, we have tried to reflect the opinions and themes that were predominant throughout the consultation. We are pleased, in turn, to present this feedback to you. This report gives a brief overview of the discussions and ideas generated at the community meetings. It highlights the work that still needs to be done. Finally, it outlines the key strategies that we can all use to continue encouraging human rights and the acceptance of diversity in our communities.

We thank the participants for sharing their experience and perspectives with us. Your input has helped us chart the way forward in this important work.

Hung Pham, MLA Calgary-Montrose
Chair

Overview

The community organizations represented during the Dialogue with Stakeholders indicated that much excellent work already has been done in our province. They were proud of the proactive work they had undertaken to increase understanding and acceptance of diversity and reduce discrimination. While acknowledging the progress that had been made in creating equity for all Albertans, they reminded us that this work is not complete. There are still Albertans who face discrimination or who are unable to access the services and programs they want and need. Participants told us that as our province becomes more diverse, we must be vigilant to ensure that all Albertans are treated fairly and with respect.

While the proactive work the community and the government has been doing has made a difference, there are still areas that need to be addressed.

- Some Albertans are uncomfortable with people and ways that are different.
- Some Albertans still face discrimination.
- Some Albertans face barriers to their full participation in Alberta society.
- Changes in attitudes and to policies, practices and systems within organizations are required in order to deal with the root causes that limit access and fair treatment.
- Short-term projects and funding are not sufficient to support sustained change.
- Stakeholder groups, institutions, and organizations need greater capability in order to achieve effective results.
- Human rights and diversity work is complex and difficult.

Ensuring societal norms where all people can access the services they require, where they have the opportunity to contribute to and participate fully in society, where they are treated equitably and with respect, and where it is unacceptable to discriminate improves the quality of life in the province for all Albertans. Everyone has a role to play in this process.

Participants in the Dialogue with Stakeholders identified several key strategies that would help them address these areas.

- Undertake education for human rights and diversity.
- Work collaboratively to achieve mutual goals by sharing expertise and resources.
- Build organizational capability to affect change.

The Education Fund's future role in supporting these key strategies will be three-fold. The Education Fund will

- support community organizations,
- collaborate, and
- educate for change.

What Albertans Told Us

The Dialogue with Stakeholders was an opportunity for people and organizations involved in human rights and diversity work to meet and discuss their successes and their thoughts about the future. Participants began by reviewing the proactive and preventative work that is already being done across the province. This work has made a difference. Participants also recognized the need to reach beyond current efforts to take the next steps in addressing the issues facing us. Participants identified a number of areas that could still use improvement.

Dealing with diversity

Alberta's population is richly diverse and participants reminded us there is strength in that diversity. There are often misconceptions and misunderstandings about those who are different than us — whoever "us" happens to be. There is still work to be done to help Albertans be aware of and understand diversity. Participants in several of the sessions felt this can be especially true in more homogeneous rural communities. We were reminded that Albertans need to be aware not only of the benefits of diversity, but also of the costs and consequences of discrimination.

Confronting discrimination

Participants told us that discrimination and apprehension about diversity are exemplified in a spectrum of ways. At one end of the spectrum, such issues are systemic. That is, they are interwoven into social and organizational structures, regulations and policies. At the other end, individuals through their attitudes, behaviours and lack of knowledge, discriminate or have concerns about diversity. Participants urged us to recognize that different strategies need to be developed to address the full spectrum of discrimination. There was consensus among participants when they told us that some Albertans deny that discrimination exists. At every meeting, participants expressed concern about the discrimination faced by the Aboriginal community.

Removing barriers

Barriers to equal access are still a concern for many Albertans. When participants spoke about "access," they meant it in the broadest sense. For some Albertans, there are physical barriers such as doorways that are too narrow. Others are limited because the service they would like to use is inappropriate or not culturally sensitive. While there may be no intention to discriminate, sometimes, the consequence of a practice or policy means some Albertans are treated inequitably. This limits the ability of Albertans to participate fully in our society.

Building understanding

Participants in every session of the Dialogue with Stakeholders spoke of the need to develop understanding in a variety of areas.

Rights and Responsibilities

Albertans, both newcomers and those born here, need to know about their human rights and how to respond when their rights have been violated. With rights also come responsibilities. Individuals cannot expect to be treated fairly if they do not respect laws or meet obligations.

Human Rights and Our Diversity
There is still a need to help Albertans become more aware and understanding of obvious differences, the ones we can see. However, there is a greater need to increase our understanding of differences that are less obvious — differences in beliefs and values, differences in perspective and practices. Understanding of these differences is more difficult and complex but without it there is more potential for difficulties and conflicts between people and within organizations. The desired result of increased understanding is change — changed individual behaviors and attitudes and changed organizations and systems.

Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and the Education Fund
A recurring theme was the need for more information about the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and the process of investigating and making a decision about human rights complaints.

Some stakeholders also spoke about the Education Fund. Albertans need more information about the services and opportunities that the Education Fund offers. The Education Fund also needs to better promote the benefits that result from these funds.

Increasing organizational capability

Skills and resources
Many representatives from communities and organizations said that they need help maximizing their efforts. They are aware of the many skills and resources available in their communities and among organizations with similar goals. They want to increase the networking, collaboration and partnerships among community groups across the province and within communities. They want to learn more about the diversity and human rights work others are doing and how they are doing it.

Program development
Organizations also need help to plan and implement projects. They talked about the frustrations of not always being able to develop projects that could access the money that is available through the Education Fund or other sources. Some need help developing the skills and capacity to build successful projects — from the first step of transforming ideas into action plans which will meet funding criteria, to the next step of submitting effective proposals, and finally, to the review and evaluation of the projects. Smaller groups especially, with fewer staff and resources, expressed need for such help.

Financial
Some of those attending the Dialogue with Stakeholders wanted more funding to be available overall to address discomfort with diversity, issues of discrimination, and lack of fairness and access. They were concerned that the amount presently earmarked for this work does not attest to the government's commitment to this area.

A recurring theme across the province was the frustration that the non-profit sector is facing securing funds. Too often they find their staff time is consumed by writing proposals to generate the funds necessary to

keep the work going rather than doing the work that needs to be done. Many participants discussed the need for core funding for their organizations, which would cover the costs of ongoing operations. We heard from many organizations that they were unable to build sustainability for their project with short-term project funding and some needed to abandon successful initiatives because of requirements by funders for short term funding.

Coping with complexity

Multifaceted work

There are many ways to address human rights, diversity and multicultural work. The various facets of an initiative often fall within the mandates of separate government departments and, from the participants' perspective, those mandates have become narrower and more restrictive over time. In addition, groups sometimes find that the outcome of their work may fit the mandate of one department or funding agency but the program offered falls within the mandate of another. For instance, the outcome of a homework club might include removing barriers to the full participation of students in their academic life. Ensuring success at school for students is the mandate of Alberta Learning. In these cases, the project is not usually eligible for funding from either source.

Diversity of organizations

Some participants told of their struggle to respond to their community's needs within the mandates of various funders including the Education Fund. A few told us the choice to accept lottery dollars in the form of grants often went against their organizational values. Many also spoke about how they see funding criteria creating inequity amongst organizations. For instance, allowing organizations to use in-kind contributions as part of their project budget was seen by smaller organizations as giving an unfair advantage to larger organizations that already had some infrastructure in place.

Societal conditions

Some of the issues, such as affordable housing and poverty, that participants wanted the Education Fund to address are complex and extensive and beyond the scope and capacity of the Education Fund. Poverty was mentioned as a concern in every meeting.

No quick fix

A frequent theme among those attending the Dialogue with Stakeholders also spoke of the need for long-term funding for their initiatives. It takes time to build community support, to establish relationships and collaborations, not to mention to do the slow and difficult work of changing attitudes and organizations. Short-term project funding, they agreed, is simply not sufficient for this purpose.

Future Directions for Human Rights and Diversity Work

Having reviewed their successes and made an assessment of the current situation and the work that needs to be done, participants in the Dialogue with Stakeholders turned their attention to future action. Many strategies were mentioned during the meetings, and many types of initiatives were identified to move the work forward. Stakeholders also had numerous ideas for specific programs and projects. These ideas will be useful in developing annual action plans.

When participants considered who should be involved in these strategies, the short, unanimous answer was "Every one of us!" Presently, the Education Fund deals primarily with community-based organizations and the non-profit sector. Participants noted the absence of business and public institutions at the meetings. They believe that the full scope of organizations needs to get involved in this work.

After identifying the many systems with which they work and recommend working with in the future, participants concluded that all of society needs to be involved in human rights and diversity work. From government to non-profit organizations, from business to the media, from entire systems like health care and justice to each of us as individuals, there is no area that should be left out. However, it is important to set priorities for the work to be manageable.

There are certain key sectors of our society and certain key groups of people that are leverage points for the whole. If support for change is applied there, its effects would be most widely felt. The consensus among participants was that a key leverage point in our society is children and young people and the systems that serve them, primarily the education system.

Participants felt that priority must also be placed on helping to change the systems that limit full participation. Participants want to see organizations, institutions, and businesses change so that all Albertans have a chance to access opportunities and to be treated fairly and with respect. Organizations and institutions need help to accommodate differences and deal competently with diversity.

The following are a few key strategies discussed, ones which participants felt are likely to make the most difference:

Educate for human rights and diversity

Human rights and diversity education is not only education ***about*** human rights and diversity but also education ***for*** human rights and diversity. Human rights and diversity education can be seen as having three primary and intersecting components: the development of awareness and understanding, the development of skills to affect change and the change of behaviours and attitudes.

Developing awareness includes opening people's eyes to diversity and its benefits and to the existence of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. It involves learning more about a certain faith, for example, or understanding more about an organization's responsibilities under the *Human Rights,*

Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. Knowledge of this information alone does not effectively address the concerns identified by the participants in the Dialogue with Stakeholders. Knowledge that helps an individual or an organization to make choices or to change behaviours and practice is more effective.

Developing skills to build a human rights culture are also essential. These skills can range from learning how to stand up for your rights to learning how to get organizational commitment to diversity. They build capacity for action within individuals, organizations and communities. One of the goals of this work is to develop competence to deal effectively with the diversity of people who live in Alberta. Developing and using such skills is necessary to move the awareness and understanding into action.

Changing attitudes and behaviours is the third and most difficult component of human rights education. Different attitudes can lead to new ways of behaving. Human rights education can be directed at changing individual behaviours as well as organizational behaviours.

If our goal is to create a society where equality is fostered, where people can participate fully and where there is no discrimination, it means we must do more than develop awareness of human rights and diversity. Our organizations and attitudes need to transform in order to meet this goal. Transformation means that basic ideas and values are reconfigured and prevailing structures and processes are examined and, where required, altered.

Collaborate

Another key strategy named by many participants in the Dialogue with Stakeholders was to increase networking and collaboration. The issues faced in human rights and diversity work are complex. In responding to them, integrated and multifaceted approaches are most effective. They require collaboration.

Share information, knowledge and skills

Many participants in the Dialogue with Stakeholders saw the need and the value in communicating with other organizations doing similar work. At the least, this could lead to shared ideas and information. Beyond that, it might lead to shared resources and even joint projects and proposals.

Connect organizations that want to change with community expertise

Community based organizations have expertise related to their experience with being different. They know what others need to know to help their members to access services, to feel part of Alberta society, to be treated fairly. As individuals, they can contribute the wisdom of their experience as well as their knowledge of discrimination to initiatives and organizations that work to build a human rights culture. Community organizations working in the areas of disabilities, multiculturalism, social justice, sexual orientation, gender equity, faiths, youth and education have expertise which could help Alberta's businesses and institutions treat people more equitably.

Businesses, institutions and other service providers can improve their quality and accessibility by using the knowledge that resides in the organizations serving these specific populations. Without a commitment from business, public institution or service providers to do something with the information provided, providing information about differences or needs rarely changes the way organizations or individuals behave. First of all, to effect change within the public or private sector, Albertans must work with those people or organizations most directly affected by any given initiative. It is essential to talk and listen to those individuals who have experienced discrimination or the sense of being different from most others in society. Those with the experience of discrimination can help organizations wanting to improve access to identify and remove barriers. In return, those institutions, businesses and service providers have wisdom to share with community-based groups in planning and implementing projects that will affect them.

Change

Lack of understanding results in situations where individuals face discrimination or are unable to access the services and programs they need. Further, it perpetuates situations where policies, practices and procedures create barriers to equitable treatment. In order to correct this situation, individual, organizational and institutional behaviours need to change.

Organizations and individuals need to develop the capability to transform organizations and attitudes. If our objective is to create a province where all people can access the services they require, where they have the opportunity to contribute to and participate fully in society, where they are treated equitably and with respect and where it is unacceptable to discriminate, then there is a need to continue the societal change work that has begun.

Key Strategies for the Education Fund

The objective of the Education Fund is to complement and support the work that community organizations are undertaking. In order to address the issues raised by participants during the Dialogue with Stakeholders, the Education Fund will support community organizations in the following ways

- provide financial support;
- collaborate on initiatives; and
- develop educational tools, programs and materials.

Financial Support

The criteria for the financial assistance program will be redeveloped to reflect the concerns and suggestions made during the Dialogue with Stakeholders. For instance, greater priority will be placed on supporting initiatives that undertake change, as discussed in this report. Consideration will be given to developing ways to recognize that the nature of this work often requires developmental strategies, relationship building and sometimes long term involvement. A priority will be ensuring the financial assistance process is clear and that there is equity for organizations applying.

Greater consideration will be given to community initiatives

- that address discrimination and work to eliminate it;
- that help organizations, institutions and businesses change so that their policies, procedures and practices no longer discriminate or create barriers to full and equitable participation by Albertans.

Staff associated with the Education Fund will continue to help communities develop successful applications. The availability of this service will be better promoted.

Collaboration

The Education Fund will collaborate to improve its services. We need to work together to be successful at creating change. The knowledge and experience of the community needs to be respected and used. The Education Fund will continue to consult with communities and involve them in planning and in the development of initiatives. The Dialogue with Stakeholders in itself is a reflection of the Education Fund's commitment to consult communities and involve them in planning.

The Education Fund will explore ways to help organizations to address the complexity of this work and the diversity of interventions through cross-departmental projects. This strategy supports the government's desire for greater cooperation amongst departments.

Some issues raised by participants, such as improving the skills necessary to develop effective initiatives, are outside the mandate of the Education Fund. By collaborating with other agencies better positioned to teach such skills, the Education Fund would be able to make those skills more accessible to its stakeholders.

As for the societal issues identified, such as poverty, the Education Fund will continue to contribute to solutions that help to address these conditions by funding initiatives that fall directly within the mandate of the Education Fund. For instance, the Education Fund might contribute to eradicating poverty by supporting a project that reduces discrimination faced by economically

disadvantaged individuals or that results in increased opportunity thus allowing individuals to participate fully in the economic life of the province.

At each of the sessions of the Dialogue with Stakeholders, discrimination faced by Aboriginal peoples was identified. In order to respond appropriately, the Education Fund will work closely with the Aboriginal community to develop the strategies that will achieve mutual goals.

Education for Change

The Education Fund has several roles when it comes to building a society where discrimination is not tolerated and equity is expected. One is to make sure that the public knows that there is legislation to protect them from discrimination — the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*, including its terms and requirements, and our rights and responsibilities under the law. Albertans also need to know that there is an Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. They need to understand and be clear about the commission's processes and believe the commission to be accessible to all those who require its services.

The Education Fund also has a role to play in keeping the issues of human rights and diversity before the public. Its job is to remind Albertans of the consequences of discrimination, the value of diversity, and the benefits of a human rights culture.

The Education Fund must also promote its own role. It must increase its visibility throughout the province. It needs to promote the opportunities available to communities through the Education Fund and to publicize the successes of the projects carried out in partnership with community organizations.

The Education Fund will help community organizations and members increase their skills and abilities necessary to implement human rights and diversity work. Development of skills that help to transform organizations will be encouraged.

The Education Fund will continue to develop educational material and programs that support the community in their diversity work and contribute to building a human rights culture in Alberta.

Together, we have an opportunity to move toward our shared vision of a human rights culture. The Education Fund will continue to encourage all sectors of our society to work toward this goal.